# **Questions and Answers About Condoms**

### Why use a condom?

If you are having sex, using a condom is the best way to protect yourself from many STDs, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. You can also avoid an unplanned pregnancy.

There are condoms for both men and women. Both are effective in preventing pregnancy and the transmission of STDs. When male and female condoms break, it is almost always due to mistakes in the way they are used, not because condoms are bad products. Using a condom takes practice. Read below for tips on using condoms correctly.

#### How do I use a male condom?

Some people think that knowing how to use a male condom is automatic. This isn't true. Using a condom requires information and takes practice. Practice by yourself, before you are with a partner, so you have confidence and are relaxed when the time comes.

Tips to keep in mind when using the male condom:

- All condoms are not the same. They come in many different textures, shapes and sizes. Most condoms are made of latex, but polyurethane condoms are available if you or your partner has a latex allergy. Try different kinds until you find one you like. You can even watch a fun and informative <u>cartoon video about condoms</u> [YouTube].
- Use only water-based lubricants, such as K-Y or Astroglide. Oil-based lubricants, such as Vaseline, can weaken latex and cause condoms to break. Although most male condoms are already lubricated, some people like to add more lubricant both inside and outside the condom to reduce friction.
- If you're thinking about having sex with a new partner, let your partner know that you use condoms to protect yourself. This is a great time for each person to talk about what feels good.
- Condoms don't have to interrupt the moment. Your partner can help put the condom while stroking you. This keeps your penis erect while staying close to your partner.
- Condoms are most effective when used correctly. <u>This video</u> [YouTube] gives step-by-step instructions on how to use one.

#### How do I use a female condom?

The female condom is made of a lubricated polyurethane sheath with a ring on each end. One end is inserted into the vagina and the other stays outside the vagina, covering the vulva. The inner ring holds the condom in place inside the vagina. The outer ring keeps the condom from bunching up inside the woman and can be used to guide the penis into the vagina. An earlier version of the female condom was made of a material that sometimes made noise during sex. The new female condom is made of an improved material that does not make noise.

Tips to keep in mind when using the female condom:

- The female condom will feel different than the male condom. Try the condom a few times and practice inserting it before using it with a partner.
- Being able to insert the female condom several hours before expected use is one of the advantages of the female condom. This avoids the issue of interrupting the moment.

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- Use only water-based lubricants, such as K-Y or Astroglide. The female condom is lubricated in the package, but some people find that they like to add more.
- Practice inserting the female condom before you use it the first time. Inserting the female condom is like inserting a tampon in that some women will find different positions (squatting, standing with one foot elevated or lying down) work better for their body than others. See <a href="this video">this video</a> [YouTube] for instructions on inserting the female condom (<a href="text-attractions">text instructions</a> [Planned Parenthood]).

### Should I use a male and female condom together?

**NO!** While this may seem like a good idea, it isn't. Using both together can increase the chance that one or both will rip, and rips are what makes a condom ineffective.

It's also a bad idea to place a male condom over another male condom. This actually increases the chance that the condoms will break.

If you want to maximize effectiveness of either male or female condoms, store them correctly, use water-based lubricants only, and make sure you roll the male condom onto the penis correctly, or insert the female condom correctly. Talking to your partner about your sexual history, getting tested for HIV and STDs, and putting on the condom before there is any contact with your partner's genitals also helps reduce the chances of disease transmission.

#### Which condom should I use?

It's a personal choice which condom to use. Men sometimes complain about the fit of a male condom, so make sure you try different styles and sizes. Male condoms come in regular and large sizes, "baggy head," ribbed (for extra sensation for your partner), and ultra thin for extra sensations for the wearer. Flavored condoms for use during oral sex are also available.

Getting an assortment of condoms is a great way to try them out and find the right one for you. Call a <u>HIV/STD</u> service provider in your area to see if they distribute free condoms. You can also shop online for condoms and order an assortment package, or buy them at most drug stores, supermarkets and other retail outlets. Finding a condom that works for you is like finding a favorite pair of jeans. Once you find the right one, you'll never want to go without it.

#### Can I reuse a condom?

No. Use a condom only once and discard in the trash after use.

#### I've heard I can use the female condom for anal sex. Is that true?

Some people use the female condom in the rectum as protection for the receptive partner during anal sex. However, this is not an approved use by the manufacturer. Some health care providers worry that the inner ring can cause damage to the thin membranes on the inside of the anus. The inner ring can be removed, but this can cause the condom to twist inside the rectum. The Fenway Institute provides information on using the <a href="female">female</a> condom for anal sex (PDF) [American College of Physicians].

The female condom can also be used for anal sex if the insertive partner takes the inner ring out and puts the condom over his penis. Use plenty of water-based lube both inside and outside the condom.

Talk to a health care provider before using the female condom for anal sex.

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## Condoms seem so old-fashioned and out dated. How can I make using condoms interesting?

Condoms can help you and your partner relax and enjoy sex by putting your mind at ease about pregnancy and disease prevention. The trick is to talk about condom use before clothes come off. Once people are naked, they feel vulnerable, and that makes talking about health-related issues more difficult. Whether you are with a person you just met or a long time partner, when you think you are going to have sex, bring up the condom. Some of these phrases might be helpful:

### "I'm really interested in getting more involved with you. Do you have a condom with you?"

If the person says no, or that he or she doesn't like condoms, you can respond by telling the person how much more you enjoy sex when you don't have to worry and can really focus on your partner.

"I really like dancing with you and would like to continue the action at my place. I have ultra sensitive condoms. Is that style good for you?"

This is another way to bring up condoms while reinforcing your interest in the other person. Talking about what kind of condom you have tells the person you use condoms while opening up a conversation about what condoms the other person may like.

If you get swept up in the moment and don't talk about the condom first, you can still introduce it later. Once the penis is erect, you can say:

"I am really turned on by you. I'll be even more turned on if you help me put this condom on."

You can guide your partner's hand to show how to keep your penis erect while putting on the condom at the same time. Or, if you're the receptive partner, you can offer to put the condom on. Make sure you both know how to put the condom on correctly.

If you get a new partner and you haven't had sex yet, shopping for condoms together is a great way to reinforce that you are both responsible for your sexual health. And shopping for condoms doesn't have to be a serious matter—laugh, make jokes and check out different places. Condoms can be found in drug stores, grocery stores, adult bookstores, convenience stores – even in the restrooms of some clubs. Be sure to check expiration dates and always keep condoms in a cool, dry place – away from heat and direct sunlight.

If you're a little shy about asking a clerk for help, shopping online for condoms is a great way to take your time, read other user's reviews and compare prices. You'll have to wait a few days for shipping but you can always pick up a few at the local convenience store while you wait.

Don't forget – condoms are the best way to protect yourself from STDs if you are having sex. Practice putting them on, try different kinds and talk to your partner. Using condoms will help you relax and enjoy sex without worrying about pregnancy or diseases.

The American Sexual Health Association also provides more ideas on how to negotiate condoms with a partner.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call: 1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español) 1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: KnowMyStatus.org

State Health Services